



Sustainable Tourism Development in Clinton-Graceville-Beardsley, Minnesota



Photo taken by First Impression Visitor

MINNESOTA SUSTAINABLE TOURISM ASSESSMENT FOR SMALL COMMUNITIES PROJECT

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:

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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIPS**

Sustainable Tourism Development in Clinton-Graceville-Beardsley, Minnesota

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Spring 2013, the communities of Clinton-Graceville-Beardsley (C-G-B) collaboratively applied for and were selected to be part of the Minnesota Sustainable Tourism Assessment for Small Communities project conducted by the University of Minnesota Extension Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships and University of Minnesota Tourism Center. The project was created to assist small non-metro communities as they identify, assess and develop local assets as part of a sustainable tourism development effort.

Tourism in Minnesota is a \$12.5 billion dollar industry that generates 17 percent of state sales tax revenue and more than 245,000 jobs from entry level to executive level positions. This happens in virtually every county of the state. In Big Stone County, tourism generates \$3.9 million (Explore Minnesota Tourism, 2014). Expanding regional assets helps attract more visitors or keep visitors longer in the region. Sustainable tourism and recreation efforts integrate the economic, environmental, and social dimensions of sustainability by satisfying community tourism needs, protecting natural and cultural resource attractions, and preserving development capabilities for future generations.

One of the key pre-development needs is to clearly understand what tourism includes. Several leaders in the communities recognize tourism as a potential in the region, but overall awareness and understanding of tourism within the communities is limited. Creating a shared understanding of tourism will help prepare residents and build interest to get involved.

The Tourism Assessment process involved components designed to gather and understand the communities' tourism situation, and provide a basis for the core recommendations listed below. For example, the C-G-B Community Team spearheaded local tourism resource inventories and analysis, a First Impressions Team from another community quietly visited Clinton-Graceville-Beardsley to carry out a broad assessment of the local tourism strengths and weaknesses, and, in October, an Expert Team spent a day in the three communities, exploring the area and visiting with community members.

Clinton-Graceville-Beardsley (C-G-B) and the surrounding area provide both existing and potential opportunities for tourism development utilizing the natural and cultural environments. To successfully harness and sustain these opportunities, community involvement, collaboration and planning will be necessary. This report shares the data collected during this project and provides recommendations for action the three communities might consider to harness or expand tourism opportunities.

General recommendations for any sustainable tourism development initiative include:

- Maintain awareness that tourism is just one important element of the community's economy.
- Build on existing natural and cultural capital.
- Encourage sustainable tourism practices across private and public sectors.
- Create and maintain quality products and services.
- Continue to build local awareness, provide information and increase support for tourism from city governments, civic organizations, user groups and faith-based communities.
- Engage these partners in discussions, tourism development planning and action.



- Commit organizational supports to the development of opportunities for additional lodging, food and tourism-related businesses to meet the needs of tourism now and as it grows.
- Identify ways to measure success and impact.
- Identify an organization to provide leadership in creating a regional tourism plan that aligns with the shared values of the region. Once this plan is created, recruit, involve and work with individuals and organizations to implement strategies that increase tourism and recreation in the area in accordance with that plan.
- Build on existing social and human capital.
- Provide information and engage residents to build local awareness and increase support for tourism.
- Create, maintain and enhance authentic tourism experiences.
- Ask: *“how does each possibility reflect C-G-B as a region and our shared values?”*
- Enhance the availability of information about the region on the internet and in the community.
- Use research to better understand and address the needs of identified tourism markets.

As a next step, consider projects that can address opportunities discovered in this project. This includes evaluating, maintaining and developing tourism assets; building community support for tourism, developing a planned approach to provide sustained leadership, and creating a marketing strategy that focuses on identified target markets. Ideas and strategies are listed below. These are presented at more length in the report, as well as findings are provided to support these ideas.

To evaluate, maintain and enhance assets and attractions...

- Build a niche for the area by combining strengths in natural resources and farming assets. This includes wildlife-associated recreation and agritourism/culinary tourism.
- Enhance Toqua Park as an asset.
- Take advantage of the King of Trails Scenic Byway.
- Find ways to tap new talent available in the area to bring new ideas and potential business opportunities.
- Improve wayfinding and signage in the region.
- Generate a list of potential assets available in each community.
- Provide a nice (lodging) accommodation and guides (potentially) to build on strengths in friendliness and hunting and fishing opportunities.
- Expand the marketing for the Arts Meander to new places (using the brochures and Internet).
- Develop a kite-flying festival to take advantage of assets of open space, breezes, and large lakes.
- Develop lodging on farm(s) to overcome lack of accommodations and build on travel trends towards ag-tourism.
- Consider promoting day trips to area to targeted interest groups.
- Build an information kiosk to serve visitors need for travel information.

To build community support for tourism...

- Consider an education effort for residents and elected officials about what tourism is and why it

can benefit the communities and the area.

- Encourage businesses to cross-promote local businesses to retain visitors in communities longer.
- Celebrate the collaborative manner in which the three communities view each other.
- Develop an ongoing customer service training effort to reach all regional businesses.
- Community engagement and perseverance is key to building and maintaining support and involvement.
- Consider the plans of neighboring communities, counties and region beyond the communities involved in this project.
- Create regular communications about tourism and local success. How do residents get information about every day events and other one time or annual events?

To develop leadership and organization for tourism initiatives...

- Community collaboration and planning will be necessary to sustain any efforts and make them successful.
- Big Stone Area Growth (BSAG), can and should play a critical role by facilitating and leading a coalition of stakeholders including businesses, citizens, and various levels of government to develop sustainable tourism in the Clinton-Graceville-Beardsley area.
- Involve community members as much as possible in BSAG's vision and action plan. Continue to recruit, involve and work with individuals and organizations in developing and implementing strategies that will create and support tourism and recreation business in the area.
- Identify a formal organization or group to take the lead in implementing ideas and projects.
- Consider relationships with regional organizations such as Western Minnesota Prairie Waters and Big Stone Area Chamber of Commerce.
- Work with Community Development Services, Inc. to develop a plan for moving tourism development opportunities forward in an organized manner that is realistic and can be measured.

To market Clinton-Graceville-Beardsley to tourists...

- Create a marketing plan that incorporates multiple communication strategies to reach identified target markets.
- Utilize free promotional opportunities available on www.exploreminnesota.com
- Work with Explore Minnesota Tourism's regional office for help in planning, facilitation, and ideas to promote tourism.
- Develop print or online maps geared towards identified target markets such as
 - hunters, displaying public hunting grounds and associated fall festivals/attractions corresponding to the season, and
 - ag/food tourists with farms and food-related attractions.
- Get on the web with the area's assets by developing listings of things to do by city.
- Consider a Youtube video showing off the area and each community.
- Create a photo or video contest for residents and post winning entries on the website.
- Explore collaborative marketing with other communities along the King of Trails Scenic Byway.
- Explore the opportunity of becoming a Dark Sky destination. Local residents mentioned the beautiful skies at night and this is an attraction.
- Partner with community and area businesses and organizations like Big Stone Lake Area Chamber of Commerce and Western Minnesota Prairie Waters to grow the available funds to market the area to potential visitors.

The Clinton-Graceville-Beardsley cluster has potential to develop a realistic and sustainable community tourism initiative given its assets and a core group of supporters. This tourism assessment project represents a first step in the process. CGB can build on this momentum by leveraging regional assets in a strategic way, developing leadership potential, strengthening community involvement, and marketing effectively. We want to thank the community leadership team and the residents of Clinton, Graceville and Beardsley for their hard work in assessing this potential.

MINNESOTA SUSTAINABLE TOURISM ASSESSMENT FOR SMALL COMMUNITIES: REPORT FOR CLINTON, GRACEVILLE AND BEARDSLEY, MINNESOTA

Introduction

The communities of Clinton, Graceville and Beardsley Minnesota were selected to be part of the Minnesota Sustainable Tourism Assessment for Small Communities project in 2013. The University of Minnesota Extension Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships and the University of Minnesota Tourism Center sought communities ready to identify, assess and develop local assets as part of a sustainable tourism development initiative. This effort, led locally by a community leadership team and facilitated by Extension educators in Community Economics and Tourism Center faculty, had four goals:

1. To inventory local tourism assets;
2. To assess tourism assets from local, visitor and expert perspectives;
3. To help the community uncover opportunities for tourism development; and,
4. To help the community identify action steps for sustainable tourism development.

Defining Tourism

One of the overarching findings in each of the project communities is an opportunity to learn more about tourism. Tourism has many definitions. This project centers on “person-trips” as defined by the U.S. Travel Association: “one person on a trip away from home overnight in paid accommodations or on a day or overnight trip to places 50 miles or more (one-way) away from home.” This definition includes specific criteria of distance, time and paid accommodations, which allows measurement.

However, this definition does not describe the purpose of travel. Tourists are not just vacation travelers. Business travelers, pass-through travelers and travelers visiting friends and relatives (VFR) are also “tourists.” For smaller communities, pass-through travelers or day-trip visitors are important tourists to consider—even if they do not stay in paid accommodations. Getting them to stop, stay a while and spend money is the goal. Day visitors can generate income and if the community offers sufficient tourism opportunities they may return and stay longer and use overnight accommodations.

Identifying and differentiating current and potential types of visitors is important. For example, the VFR market is a significant segment of the tourism market in rural areas. Marketing to reach the VFR market is done primarily through community residents. This means informing community members about attractions, events and happenings available in the community and region on a regular basis. This gives them information to share with their friends and family. This can have further positive benefits in educating residents about tourism, increasing involvement and generating community pride.



Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism considers the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of sustainable development in both the planning and operation of tourism. It requires the informed participation of community members and stakeholders, strong political leadership and organization, and continuous effort to create a high level of tourist satisfaction.

For more information about sustainable tourism development for destinations, see Appendix A.

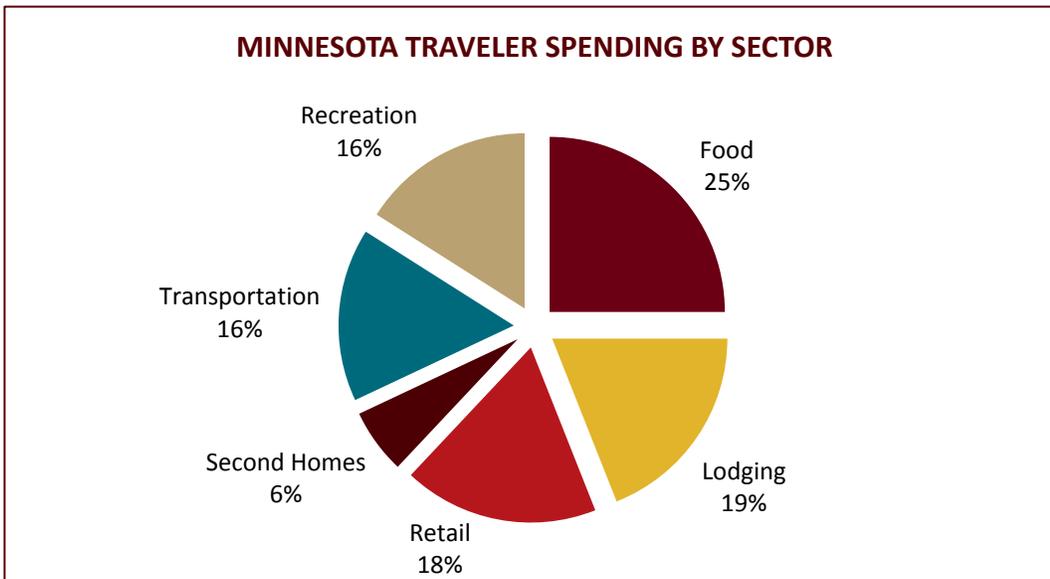
Minnesota Tourism

Tourism in Minnesota is a \$12.5 billion dollar industry that generates 17 percent of state sales tax revenue and more than 245,000 jobs from entry level to executive level positions. Spending during Minnesota's 71 million annual person-trips (overnight and day trips) is distributed throughout the economy (Explore Minnesota Tourism, 2014).

The United Nations' Environment Programme and World Tourism Organization say sustainable tourism should:

- Make use of environmental resources in a way that maintains essential ecological processes and helps to conserve the natural heritage and biodiversity.
- Respect the authenticity of host communities, conserve the cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.
- Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing benefits across the community—including employment and income-earning opportunities.

For more information see Appendix B: Explore Minnesota Tourism and Economy Fact Sheet, 2014.



Source: Explore Minnesota Tourism, 2013 based on 2011 revenue data.

Local/Regional Tourism

Tourism happens in virtually every county of the state. In Big Stone County, tourism-related businesses generate \$3.9 million (Explore Minnesota Tourism, 2011), of which 5 accommodations generated \$500,000 and recreation- and amusement-related businesses garnered over \$600,000. Dining and food services businesses brought in the remaining gross sales or \$2.8 million. Although these business categories service visitors, many of these reported sales are from local customers.

Developing Tourism Opportunities

In his book, *Marketing for Entrepreneurs*, Frederick Crane (2013) says that opportunities can be “recognized, discovered or created.” This is particularly true of tourism opportunities because tourism is about experiences.

Recognizing opportunities requires the community to match existing assets (supply) with current or potential tourist markets (demand). Example: your community has a nice regional park with bike trails and there is growing trend in bike tourism in Minnesota. Bike Alliance, MNDOT and Minnesota Department of Health have created a Bikeable Community Workshop to help communities embrace this opportunity.

(www.dot.state.mn.us/bike/lisa/BikeableCommunityWorkshop.pdf)

Discovering opportunities means supply or demand exists, and the other must be found, or “discovered.” For example, tourists around the world are becoming more interested in local foods. What supply can be found in a community? Supply could include cafes and restaurants, but also attractions such as wineries, farmers’ markets, and farm visits.

Creating opportunities is necessary when neither demand nor supply exist in an obvious manner. Thus, the community could create new opportunities. For example, as part of the local interest in developing local food experiences, the community discovers that the chef at the local café and the owner of the local meat market both have the interest and ability to teach. Could these community members create classes in something like sausage making or cooking wild game to use their skills and to promote a local experience? (adapted from Crane, 2013).

Match Supply and Demand

The communities of Clinton, Graceville and Beardsley recently hosted 30 visitors on a motorcoach day trip from Fargo. They came to the region because of a shared interest in local foods. This visit generated \$1200 in gross revenue and at least six return visitors within two months.

Source: Draeger, 2013

Characteristics of a Good Tourism Opportunity

- 1) Creates significant value for the visitor by fulfilling and unmet need.
- 2) Offers profit potential
- 3) Fits the capabilities of the community (values, skills and expertise)
- 4) Sustainable over time
- 5) Can obtain financing (as needed)
- 6) Produces measurable change in the community

Source: adapted from Crane, 2013, p 22/23



Harnessing Assets via the Community Capitals Framework

As part of the data collection in this project, communities were asked to identify and evaluate their assets. Assets can be physical resources, such as rivers or buildings, or less tangible resources, such as volunteer networks, cultural heritage, or individuals' skills.

The Community Capitals Framework (Flora, Flora & Fey, 2004) helps describe and categorize unique assets as a starting point for community and economic development—including tourism development. The creators of the framework name seven categories of resources which they call capitals: built, cultural, human, natural, political, social, and financial.

Assets become capitals when they are leveraged to improve communities (Emery, et al, 2006). The tourism assets inventory forms used in this project draw upon the Community Capitals Framework to help communities harness their assets for sustainable tourism development.



Flora et al define the capitals as:

Built capital: These are man-made, tangible assets, such as factories, schools, roads, restored habitat, and community centers. Built capital contributes to the building of other community capitals.

Cultural capital: Includes both values and approaches. Cultural capital can be thought of as the filter through which people live their lives, the daily or seasonal rituals they observe, and the way they regard the world around them.

Financial capital: Consists of money used for investment, rather than consumption. Financial capital is important for communities and residents because it can be transformed into built capital—which in turn supports other kinds of capital.

Human capital: Refers to the skills and abilities of each individual in a community. Human capital includes potential abilities and acquired skills; both formal and informal education contribute to human capital. A person’s health and leadership skills are also part of human capital.

Natural capital: includes landscape, air, water, soil, and biodiversity of plants and animals. Natural capital can be consumed or extracted for immediate profit or maintained as a continuing resource for communities.

Political capital: This kind of capital involves the ability of a group to influence the distribution of resources within a social unit, including helping set the agenda for what resources are available and who is eligible to receive them. Political capital includes organizations, connections, voice and power. Note that “political” does not mean “partisan” or “party politics” in this context.

Social capital: This consists of the networks, trust and engagement of people that exist among and within groups and communities. Social capital contributes to a sense of common identity and shared future. A community’s social capital facilitates groups’ working together.

Project Description

The Minnesota Sustainable Tourism Assessment for Small Communities project was launched to help small, non-metro communities identify and develop local assets that will attract tourists. Assets include natural and built attractions, services, facilities, people, organizations and more.

Five communities or clusters of communities, with populations under 1,500 were selected in a competitive application process to participate in the project. Located throughout the state, the communities are Akeley, Warroad, and Houston. The community clusters are Clinton, Graceville, Beardsley, and Orr-Pelican Lake, Crane Lake, Ash River, Kabetogama Lake, Rainier—working collectively as Destination Voyageurs National Park.

Each community has a unique set of assets that can be used to develop tourism opportunities. Identifying and evaluating these assets through inventories and assessments are the first steps. The process engaged each community in examining their tourism assets.

The Sustainable Tourism Assessment for Small Communities process included three data collection phases that involved community members, University of Minnesota Extension faculty and educators, Explore Minnesota Tourism staff, and regional volunteers.

In Phase 1, community residents identified local tourism assets by completing inventory and assessment forms.

In Phase 2, a resident team from one project community visited another community to conduct a mystery shopper-style visit and provide visitors’ “first impressions” of the tourism in the community.

In Phase 3, a team of tourism experts assembled by University of Minnesota Extension visited each community to conduct an assessment and on-site consultation. The visit also including a community meeting to solicit ideas and insights from residents on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) for local tourism.

This report represents the aggregated data, observations, and suggestions from all three phases.

For more information about the project and process, see Appendix C, Project Application.



SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN CLINTON-GRACEVILLE-BEARDSLEY: PROJECT FINDINGS, IDEAS AND STRATEGIES

To focus Clinton-Graceville-Beardsley’s community tourism development efforts, this report presents the findings and suggestions around four areas important to create and sustain tourism:

- 1) Evaluating, maintaining and enhancing attractions and services;
- 2) Developing tourism leadership and organization;
- 3) Building community support;
- 4) Marketing tourism.



Source: ESRI Business Analyst

About the Clinton-Graceville-Beardsley Area

The Clinton-Graceville-Beardsley area includes the northern and central portions of Big Stone County, situated in West Central Minnesota. The three communities stand fairly close together where distances range from 7 to 20 miles between them. Like other small towns of Western Minnesota, agriculture and related industries have traditionally dominated community economic activity and identity. Community leaders, however, are engaging in this tourism assessment in an attempt to diversify the economy through tourism with a modest increase in visitors dollars.

These communities are close to the border of South Dakota, as well as both Ortonville and Morris – two larger communities that serve as regional hubs and are potential marketing partners. Not unlike other areas of Western Minnesota, the countryside between towns is sparsely populated. However, residents identify many active associations and organizations in operation such as local gun clubs, scouts, senior groups, 4-H clubs, and church groups. The number of active organizations represents just how connected residents are to each other and are vehicles which can mobilize residents, including for tourism-related projects. For example, both a local 4-H club and the Graceville Senior Center filled out assessments for Extension’s tourism assessment program.

All of the communities are relatively small in size, but still make up about one quarter the population of Big Stone County. Basic measures of income and age mirror other small towns along the western front of Minnesota, relatively older and poorer than Minnesota as a whole (see Table 1). Although these demographics may point to limited capacity for tourism development, they need not be a barrier to smart, sustainable tourism efforts. On the contrary, the need for additional outside income often motivates communities with similar demographic backgrounds to pursue the modest economic benefits tourism brings.

Table 1: Basic Demographics of Communities

City	Population	Median Age	Median Household Income	% HS Degree	% College Degree
<i>Beardsley</i>	233	44.8	\$ 43,342	88%	5.8%
<i>Clinton</i>	449	43.6	\$ 36,524	86%	6.7%
<i>Graceville</i>	577	52.2	\$ 36,930	92%	15%

Sources: 2011 American Community Survey and 2010 Census, US Census Bureau

Context and Background

This tourism assessment is the first focused effort to examine the potential for tourism in the Clinton-Graceville-Beardsley area. The Big Stone Area Chamber of Commerce has featured attractions in the area and individual lodging establishments, events, and attractions have undertaken marketing efforts but there is an opportunity to coordinate and expand tourism marketing. Likewise, none of the communities have directed research into their current visitors and local tourism market(s) which will be necessary to do before moving forward with tourism development and marketing efforts.

Tourism Assets Identified by Community

Community residents filled out ten inventories which prompted them to identify tourism assets in the area, including attractions, local services for visitors, and organizational strengths. The compilation of these inventory sheets identify tourism assets from a range of perspectives, as responses were received from groups as varied as 4H clubs and a group of senior citizens.

Natural or Scenic. Natural and scenic attractions were one of the most mentioned types of attractions. Residents identified numerous natural or scenic amenities.

Community members frequently referenced Bonanza Prairie (a portion of the Big Stone State Park) as an attraction for its recreational potential, scenery, and educational center. Toqua Park in Graceville and Meadowbrook (South end of Big Stone State Park) were also commonly referenced.

Other items listed on the natural or scenic inventories are bird watching, climate, fall foliage, farms, fishing streams and lakes, forests, geological formations (granite), headwaters (Mississippi River), hiking trails, nature trails, orchards and vineyards, picnic areas, remoteness, rivers, scenic views, star gazing, swamps/wetlands, wilderness, wildlife (Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge). We should note that bird watching was the highest average rating of all listed attractions (see Appendix D Asset Inventories for compiled inventory).

Cultural or Historic. Many listed Otrey Art Gallery in this portion of the inventory, although Otrey Gallery is located outside the study area in Ortonville (about nine miles from Clinton). Additional items listed on the inventories were antique and craft shops, burial grounds, churches, early settlements, and famous historical buildings. Some attractions of particular note include the Clinton Depot and Museum, Odessa Jail, and St. Pauli Norwegian Luther Church—all of which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. One community member wrote in Wadsworth Trail and Glacial Lake.

Recreational Activities. Inventories listed a wide range of activities, although hunting and shooting sports stood out as a primary activity due to the amount of public hunting land and the related organizations in the area such as Fischer's Outback and the Graceville Gun Club. Other activities listed included archery, boating, bowling (Don's Alley), camping, canoeing, fishing, fossil hunting, golf (Graceville Golf Club), hiking, ice skating (Clinton Ice Skating Rink), kayaking, kite flying, picnicking, rock hunting, sailing, cross country skiing, swimming, and water skiing.

Special Events. Special events stood out among all other types of attractions. Items noted include the Big Stone County Fair in Clinton, art shows, ball games/tournaments, craft show (at high school in November), fishing derbies, food festivals (Corn Fest), July 4th celebrations (Toqua Days in Graceville), parades (Clinton Days Parade in June), queen coronations at Toqua Days, races (Enduro & Demo Derbies at Fairgrounds), and the Beardsley City Celebration in July. Inventory respondents ranked the St. Patrick's Day Parade highest of all events listed.

Other Attractions. Attractions listed by residents in the communities included: children's parks/playgrounds (Beardsley Park, Clinton Depot Park, and Graceville Park), DNR fish hatcheries, Graceville Library, and farmers markets in Clinton and Graceville.

Findings from Observations of First Impressions Visitors

Clinton-Graceville-Beardsley was visited and assessed by community representatives from another project community. These visitors were asked to look at the Clinton-Graceville-Beardsley area objectively and provide constructive feedback using questions provided by the University of Minnesota Tourism Center.

First impression. The visiting team had a number of observations after visiting the area for the day. Reflecting about their first impressions of the communities, the team was impressed by the lake and the natural scenery of the area, but they were generally unimpressed with the signage welcoming and directing them as visitors. Moreover, throughout their assessment, they made note of challenges in finding information about attractions that might interest them.

Hospitality. The visiting team ranked friendliness quite high in their assessment. However they did experience some negative attitudes towards visitors and toward the idea of tourism. This suggests an opportunity to educate residents about the value of tourism and to offer customer service training.

Target Audience. The visiting team identified outdoor enthusiasts living in the region as the primary audience for the C-G-B destination. They identified hunting, and especially waterfowl hunting as attractions for this audience, especially considering the public land available and the area's prairie pothole landscape. The team also identified agricultural-related attractions as something which would attract this audience to the area.

Challenges and Opportunities for Tourism Development. One opportunity the team envisioned was the development of a walking/biking path around the East Toqua Lake near Graceville. The primary challenge the team identified was that C-G-B is a great distance from any major population, although they suggested a focus on residents from within the region makes most sense as a target market. They also remarked that the transition to large farm operations may have an impact on the quality of the landscape and the potential to attract visitors with agricultural interests.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT Analysis)

One portion of the expert team visit to the area in October, 2013 included a community meeting. At the meeting, residents and representatives of each community came together to identify and discuss the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) of tourism development in the area.

In small groups of 5-6 people, residents identified as many of these aspects as possible in order to take a holistic look at tourism potential. Groups selected their top answers and worked to identify action ideas to overcome threats and weaknesses or build on opportunities or strengths.

Resident groups recognized local foods/ag heritage, natural resources/landscape, and community enthusiasm as top strengths. In discussing weaknesses, residents point to a lack of lodging options, marketing awareness, and locals not recognizing tourism potential. Community members identified opportunities the area might



Tourism Assessment SWOT meeting in Clinton
(Photo by David Fluegel)

build upon including potential partnerships between the three communities, a travel trend toward authentic and green travel, and the Arts Meander which operates across a larger region. Residents also pointed to threats which may impact local tourism development such as travel time constraints, dollars flowing outside the county to regional centers, and the lack of funding.

Residents who attended the SWOT session in Clinton put forward ten action ideas for overcoming threats and weaknesses or building on opportunities and strengths:

1. Build a niche for the area by combining strengths in natural resources and farming assets. This niche could take advantage of current travel trends towards green/authentic travel and family travel.
2. Find ways to tap new talent available in the area to bring new ideas and potential business opportunities.
3. Generate a list of potential assets available in each community.
4. Provide a nice (lodging) accommodation and guides (potentially) to build on strengths in friendliness and hunting and fishing opportunities.
5. Build on the strengths in the landscape and natural environment. Local residents have strong stewardship values to overcome the threat of the farm bill impacting conservation.
6. Expand the marketing for the Arts Meander to new places (using the brochures and Internet) to overcome threat of distance from population center and build on asset of Meander in the area.
7. Develop a kite-flying festival to take advantage of assets of open space, breezes, and large lakes. This will get people to know what assets exist in area while building skills.
8. Develop lodging on farm(s) to overcome lack of accommodations and build on travel trends towards ag-tourism.
9. Focus on day trips to area. Since little tourism marketing and development have been done to date, this seems a reasonable place to focus efforts, especially considering weakness of distance from large population centers.
10. Build an information kiosk to serve visitors need for travel information.

See Appendix E for a full listing from the SWOT.

Findings from Observations of Expert Team Visitors

This region of Minnesota offers a unique beauty, authentic rural Minnesota experiences and recreational opportunities. It is extraordinary to see how the prairie meets the lake, as well as the particular prairie landscape of Big Stone County. This mix of lakes and topography is quite different from other prairie areas in Western Minnesota. It definitely is a contrast to the complete flatness or the Red River Valley or the landscape common throughout other parts of the western prairie region with less change and diversity in topography. There is an opportunity to share the prairie experience or at least as close as we can get to what was once the prairie. The Prairie restorations are beautiful; remnants are extremely rare, less than 1/10th of 1% of Minnesota prairie still exists.



Photo by David Fluegel

The Bonanza Environmental Learning Center, Big Stone and Traverse Lakes and Big Stone State Park are all attractions that currently draw visitors. Natural scenery is on the top of most successful small town tourism attractions. Highlighting these regional features is a way to connect communities to them and offer opportunities for greater regional collaboration. Additionally, the King of Trails Scenic Byway runs along Highways 75. This byway brings visitors through the C-G-B communities and provides a good collaborative marketing opportunity. For an example of this collaborative trail marketing, see <http://www.exploreminnesota.com/things-to-do/4078/king-of-trails-scenic-byway/details.aspx>

In addition to the natural capital assets of the region, residents of the cluster of three small communities - Clinton-Graceville and Beardsley view themselves in a collaborative manner that was apparent throughout the visit. This is not always the case in rural areas, so the ability to work together is a positive social capital asset. There appears to be a lot going on in and between the communities, as well as interest in moving forward with *realistic* efforts to enhance tourism. The biggest resource is the people and there is a core cluster of folks who are quite clear-eyed about tourism's potential. Most residents encountered were very friendly and willing to help.

Clinton-Graceville -Beardsley is real, authentic small-town Midwest. The area does not have a strong developed tourism product but it does have assets that are drawing visitors and good potential to develop additional products that can be marketed to targeted interest groups. We heard or saw numerous examples during the visit. For example, the motorcoach group Noreen Thomas organized from the Fargo-Moorhead area was interested in local foods. This brought a group of visitors to the region with a particular interest, and the variety of local food related attractions in C-G-B was able to fill an entire day for these visitors. They spent money in the region and left with positive stories. This is a great example that can be replicated.

Wildlife-Associated Recreation

There is an opportunity to expand hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing appears in this region with current businesses positioned to address the needs of this market. We were struck by the amount of upland property available for hunting because it has a landscape quite different from the forest setting popularly associated with the sport. Also, plenty of public lands seem to be available for waterfowl hunting as well.

According to a 2011 US Fish and Wildlife Service study, 37.4 million U.S. residents aged 16 years and older go fishing and/or hunting. This includes 33.1 million who fished and 13.7 million who hunted – 9.4 million fished and hunted (USFWS, p. 5). Although the study finds that a larger proportion of non-metropolitan residents hunt, those from metropolitan areas (in communities with more than 50,000 population) make up 75 percent of all hunters (USFWS, p. 30). Because the overwhelming majority (86%) of hunters remained in their own state, one target market for hunting would be metropolitan areas within a few hours of the area including the Twin Cities, Fargo and Sioux Falls. Still, the strongest base upon which to find more hunters and anglers rests on those already visiting friends and relatives and those who have had a tie to the place. The full US Fish and Wildlife Service study report is available at <http://www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/fhw11-nat.pdf>.

One wildlife-related example shared with the team was from Fischer's Outback in Graceville—a real asset for any traveler looking for hunting and fishing opportunities in the area. This shop offers a unique service, a gun safety training that can be completed in three consecutive days rather than multiple sessions stretched out over several weeks. The owner told the story of a family who drove out from the Twin Cities to take advantage of this class, which offers the experience of shooting a high variety of weapons and all the rounds you want. The mother grew impatient waiting for her sons to finish shooting practice rounds and decided to try shooting herself. Now the whole family is “hooked.”

Agritourism/ Culinary Tourism

The team found more than a kernel of food-related tourism products including the Inadvertant Café, Clinton Vineyard, Hutterite colonies (with interesting cultural exchange and products), Big Stone Apple Orchard, and Big Stone County Fair. There is not one strong attraction that would bring visitors from a longer distance, such as a well-known cheese plant or working winery would. A 2009 study of agritourism in Iowa, however, provides evidence that few people are willing to travel great distances for typical agritourism activities such as pick-your-own, a wine tasting, or a farm tour. Only 10% of respondents reporting they would travel more than 90 miles (Nasers, 42). Two-



Big Stone Colony Farm Store (Photo by David Fluegel)

thirds of respondents would be willing to travel between 11-50 miles. This suggests that the communities should best target day-trippers within an hour's drive. Combining attractions into an organized event could pull visitors from a distance however. For an example of a successful combination of agritourism assets visit the website of Fermentation Fest in Southwest Wisconsin (<http://fermentationfest.com/>), which organizes around both food and art. Neither food or art on their own would probably bring in outside visitors from a distance, but together the festival does.

A recent survey profiling agritourists in Wisconsin offers data which can inform consideration of a focus on ag-based food tourism in the C-G-B area (Brown, 2012). The median spending on a trip that included agritourism was \$137, of which 41 percent was spent on food for meals or for food purchased from agritourism businesses; the typical Wisconsin traveler spends 25% of their trip expenditures on food and meals. Most importantly, 94 percent of all respondents purchased food or drink from an agritourism business. And so, identifying products for visitors to purchase is an important element for developing agritourism. The Wisconsin profile found that supporting local

farmers and businesses motivated respondents, with 88 percent reporting this as an important reason for choosing agritourism activities. In planning their trips, respondents named recommendations from friends, personal web searches, and business websites as most useful marketing. The majority (74%) of Wisconsin respondents reported traveling with a partner/spouse or family (70%), and the least number traveled with an organized tour. This suggests that while regional group tours may offer some potential, but is probably not the primary target market for C-G-B agritourism businesses.

On a related note, one visitor attraction the team noticed was the farmer's market in Graceville. The team saw a sign indicating hours from 5-7pm at the corner of Studdart and Hwy 75, the location was not provided. Although this farmers market is primarily an asset for local residents, it is an amenity that can get visitors to stop. A clear location is important for those unfamiliar with the area.

Toqua Park

Opposite Graceville on East Toqua Lake, this county-owned park is a gem and provides recreation opportunities for visitors. Situated on a beautiful lake, it has a number of amenities including campsites, a golf course, ball fields and playground. Four strategies could improve this asset:

- First, there were several signs stating that the park exists, but once in the park there were no wayfinding signs leading users to the park features. This is an easy opportunity to show visitors that they are welcome.
- Second, the addition of biking and walking lanes to roads leading to the park would provide greater safety and encourage use. This would also direct visitors between the park and the downtown district. Several residents at the community meeting noted that on a nice summer night it's not uncommon to see people walking around the lake on the county road. Improving the experience of walking around the lake will benefit residents and visitors alike. The distance around the lake is reasonable, and visitors in town can be encouraged to stay a bit longer to enjoy it. It also provides a business opportunity for bike, recreational equipment or canoe rentals.
- Third, this park and its close proximity to the community could be marketed as a family vacation spot. Families looking for a low intensity camping experience, on a small lake, with an easy connection to a small community might find this attractive. An assessment of the current purpose and use of the campsites is recommended. Rates seem well below market rates.
- Forth, one team member asked which recreational opportunities are allowed on Lake Toqua and whether equipment



Photo by Cynthia Messer



Photo by David Fluegel

is available for these activities. Kayak and canoe rentals, or other recreational equipment rentals may be an opportunity for a local business. Given that it is a shallow lake with good steady wind, windsurfing or small sailboat opportunities or competitions maybe be possible.

Business Infrastructure



Photo by Cynthia Messer

The built capital in the C-G-B communities can be a tourism asset. We observed generally clean, well-kept downtowns and neighborhoods in the communities. Each community has a local restaurant, and several nice businesses, including local shops or groceries featuring local products. Clearly, the communities are investing in their downtowns. A key factor for visitors exploring a community’s main street is signage. Some businesses have lovely signs or fun window art, but this can be encouraged in every business. Visitors want to easily identify the type of business and its hours. They want to feel welcome by those businesses and the town. Signs on the highway or at waypoints can help

visitors find the hidden assets. In each community there are buildings that looked run down and vacant. This may be unavoidable but use the empty windows to display local art, historical interpretation or something that engages the visitor. This would prevent a negative impression. For example, the community of Akeley Minnesota displays local art projects in empty windows -building social capital and reinforcing positive messages for residents too. In Houston, Minnesota, murals on buildings such as the library and hardware store create a pleasant impression for visitors and residents.

There appear to be retail opportunities in the area. Downtown Graceville had less activity than downtown Clinton on the day of the team’s visit. Graceville is one of the larger communities in the area and should be able to support some small unique retailers. Hendricks, MN is a good example to look to for ideas.

The Wolf House B&B is a great new asset for Graceville and the region. It’s a wonderful concept for a B&B and the owner was friendly. She indicated that friends and family were the primary market for her B&B. This requires residents and local businesses to know about and promote it. Currently she doesn’t do a great deal of advertising, but would like to see more of her weekdays filled. Advertising to business travelers and hunters might be an opportunity for her to explore. The building is a great reuse of a main street store front, and it’s an uncommon location for a B&B. It brings visitors right onto the town’s business area. This is an important asset for the community’s tourism efforts, fulfills an identified need, and is locally owned.



Photo by David Fluegel

The need for overnight accommodations was mentioned frequently among community members exploring tourism. Increasing the awareness/visibility of the hunting lodge and the Wolf Lodge in downtown Graceville, with clear signage leading to the location from the main traffic points and local support,



Photo by David Fluegel

will help retain these important lodging resources. If the region wants to pursue additional tourism, there will not be enough rooms to accommodate large groups. One team member suggested the possibility of organizing rooms in private residences through a tool such as Aire B&B to build room capacity.

Wayfinding/Signage

The location of these communities on Highways 75 and 28 make them accessible. Yet, as simple as it may seem, signs make a big difference. Big signs with prominent colors are an easy way to guide visitor to attractions. Even in the days of GPS, signs make life just a little easier. They are also the primary way to communicate with visitors passing through the area. As an example of problems with signage, there was no visible signage on the main highways in town to public access for Lake Toqua.

Local small town restaurants can entice passing travelers to stop. Higher quality signage will make restaurants more attractive and answer questions visitor have. Post hours clearly. What are regional dining options after 2pm? How will a traveler find out? There may be opportunities for local restaurants to specialize in something particularly good, feature local products or offer menu items that appeal to different palettes while still catering to locals. Think Betty's Pies near Duluth. Key businesses such as restaurants are an ideal place for regional maps and information about attractions, which should be placed where visitors will easily see and access them.



Photo by Cynthia Messer

The team attempted to find the antique shop, which was listed in the inventories, but couldn't find it even after receiving directions. Also, a team member remarked that the Google map and the actual street signs called the main street in Graceville two different names; this can be corrected through communication with Google.

Sustainable Tourism Development: Next Step Ideas and Strategies

It's the region, not the individual communities that will attract visitors to Clinton, Graceville and Beardsley. Assets like Big Stone Lake, the prairies, and the little towns create an attractive opportunity. One expert team member observed, "I could see a three-day weekend cruising around Big Stone and Traverse Lakes while hitting some small towns along the way. These communities are not destinations singly, but I would visit the region and happily stay in Graceville. The key is putting it all together: where to eat, rent recreational



Photo by Cynthia Messer

equipment, ride bikes with my family, fish, sleep, camp, etc.

It's even easier if there is an event to attend loaded with family activities. It's even better if there is something in the dead of winter to get my kids and I out of the house. Also, my car is capable of crossing state boundaries, so connecting with South Dakota communities isn't against the rules. In fact, it's encouraged."

Many small things can be easily addressed to create a total package of tourism potential. For example, the depot in Clinton is centrally located with a small park space; but it needs interpretation and signage about hours. If someone comes after hours, there is nothing to explain what this is or why it is important. The Wadsworth Trail Historic marker is isolated from the community. If someone stops to read it, what else is there for them to explore about this? Check with the Stevens County Historical Museum and Fort Wadsworth for opportunities to connect.

These communities have lots of potential. Many ideas to develop the area for tourism will require new people and more people. This is likely the biggest challenge. So, community engagement and perseverance will be key ingredients to turning fantasies into dreams; dreams into plans; plans into reality.

Thinking regionally means looking at regional collaborations for marketing and for potential markets. Both Big Stone Area Chamber and Prairie Waters are experienced organizations and offer great opportunities for collaborative marketing, seeking grants and learning about tourism.

Certainly, branding brings greater awareness of the area to visitors and potential visitors. In brainstorming taglines to attract visitors, especially from Minnesota, team members suggested "Explore the bump!" or "The Minnesota bulge...we are clearly out of the woods!" A cute tagline could bring attention to a beautiful area of the state and set the location in people's minds, but should be considered within the context of a branding study.

The following recommendations are suggested for community consideration based on a combination of observations and suggestions from community residents, first impression visitors, and expert team members involved in the course of this tourism assessment project. In addition to specific ideas, broader general recommendations for any sustainable community tourism initiative are provided.

General recommendations

- Maintain awareness that tourism is just one important element of the community's economy.
- Build on existing natural and cultural capital.
- Encourage sustainable tourism practices across private and public sectors.
- Create and maintain quality products and services.
- Continue to build local awareness, provide information and increase support for tourism from city governments, civic organizations, user groups and faith-based communities.
- Engage these partners in discussions, tourism development planning and action.
- Commit organizational supports to the development of opportunities for additional lodging, food and tourism-related businesses to meet the needs of tourism now and as it grows.
- Identify ways to measure success and impact.
- Identify an organization to provide leadership in creating a regional tourism plan that aligns with the shared values of the region. Once this plan is created, recruit, involve and work with individuals and organizations to implement strategies that increase tourism and recreation in the area in accordance with that plan.
- Maintain awareness that tourism is just one important element in a broader regional development.
- Build on existing social and human capital.
- Provide information and engage residents to build local awareness and increase support for tourism.
- Create, maintain and enhance authentic tourism experiences.
- Ask: "how does each possibility reflect C-G-B as a region and our shared values?"
- Enhance the availability of information about the region on the internet and in the community.
- Use research to better understand and address the needs of tourism markets.

Evaluating, maintaining and enhancing attractions and services

The two most promising opportunities for tourism development in Clinton-Graceville-Beardley are related to what the communities already have. Enhancing the amenities and services to support visitors provides the best potential to benefit existing businesses and create new opportunities.

Agritourism / Culinary Tourism

Opportunity exists to build on activities already underway in the C-G-B area to support and grow local food businesses. The recently organized local foods visit from Fargo (and the return visit from a smaller group) was a good start. Considering the wave of the national local foods movement, positioning the area as a place to learn about food production and have authentic experiences with local food producers should pay off as the trend continues.



Expert team members and local residents identified multiple attractions related to agritourism such as the farmers market, Inadvertant Café, Hutterite Colonies, Clinton vineyard, an apple farm, and multiple farms that market local foods directly. One of the most important recommendations is to organize these attractions together because none of have significant pulling power alone. Coordination will create enough activity and product for visitors to make a trip:

- **Aggregate product.** One idea mentioned during the SWOT meeting was to create a central location for selling the specialty crops grown in the area. This could be the café in Clinton or one of the Hutterite Colonies which already have facilities and hours of operation. Regardless, each operation should know of each other's product and carry each other's marketing materials or products whenever appropriate.
- **Cooperative marketing.** In a print or online format such as a map or website the area could list all food-related attractions, organize routes, and highlight other attractions and services which would be of interest to these types of visitors. Considering the importance of web-based marketing to agritourists (Brown, 2012), getting each business some form of web presence is an important first step. The effort could begin by simply putting information on the Explore Minnesota Tourism site.
- **Resident-focused Event.** As a possible stepping stone to greater events, the communities may want to host a small food and farm expo where local farms and food operations feature their products and market their products to local residents. The purpose of an event like this would be three-fold: (1) to raise the profile of local businesses operating in the area, (2) to help local food businesses find local customers, and (3) to create networks among local food businesses so they can connect on ways to coordinate their efforts.
- **Visitor-focused Event.** One way to draw visitors from a distance is through an organized event. This could be as simple as an organized tour of open houses at farms and related businesses or as complex as a week-long group of activities such as those of the Fermentation Fest in Wisconsin. This Fest features workshops, speakers, and art installations. One example of a simple, one-day community event focused on a food product is Maple Fest in Vergas, MN: <http://www.vergasmn.com/maplesyrupfest2013/Vergas%20Maple%20Syrup%20Fest%20poster%202013.pdf>
- **Group Tours.** Organized bus tours could provide a sampling of all that is available, but will require someone with expertise and the desire to coordinate. Businesses will need education about hosting groups - everything from what to charge to risk management, to amenities required by groups of people (toilet facilities, drinking water etc.). Organizers can connect with the group tours resources offered by Explore Minnesota Tourism and other state associations such as Tour Minnesota Association (www.tourmn.org).

Natural Resource Tourism

Offerings related to natural resources can be expanded for fishermen, birders, hunters, geology enthusiasts and more. The geologic history of the area did not come up, but the region has several unique attributes including Browns Valley Man, the oldest human bones found in North America; the continental divide; and Glacial Lake Agassiz.

Another area to consider expanding is trails to enhance bicycling, roller blading, and hiking opportunities. A trail could be added around Lake Toqua fairly easily. Is that an old Railroad bed that went through Clinton? Can this be developed and linked to other trails?

There are a number of opportunities for entrepreneurship in the area. For example, bait shops, picnic basket shops, canoe and kayak and paddleboat rental shops offer potential small business ventures for residents in the area. Feasibility studies and businesses plans should be developed if entrepreneurs find an idea to be attractive. Liz Larkin with Community Development Services or regional Small Business Development Centers can provide assistance.

Explore developing or expanding festivals to take advantage of what is already in the area with events around kite flying, bird watching or star gazing. Festivals take careful planning and require many volunteers but they also build local pride and introduce communities to regional visitors and beyond. Festivals and events could feature weekend activities – genealogy, women’s getaways, gardening tour, music, ethnic crafts etc. – to create overnight visits for targeted markets. The University of Minnesota Tourism Center offers an online Festival and Event Management class to help festival planners. For more information see:

<http://www.tourism.umn.edu/EducationTraining/FestivalEventManagement/index.htm>

Together these communities can create the Prairie Town Experience, blending online store summaries and biographies, if they offer training to business owners. Visitors stop by each store and discuss the area with an informed local. For an example, consider a visit to Fort Snelling. Continued brainstorming of ideas like this and others can identify ideas that resonate and have potential.

Building Community Support

- Consider an education effort to help area residents and elected officials recognize what tourism is all about and why tourism can benefit the communities and the area.
- Encourage businesses to cross-promote local businesses to retain visitors in communities longer. A good example of how to effectively do this is found in Fertile Minnesota. Consider a visit and conversation with main street businesses there to learn new approaches.
- Develop an ongoing customer service training effort to reach all regional businesses. Even if one person disrespects a visitor it reflects poorly on the entire community. Consistent, quality service across businesses with shared customers is essential to creating positive experiences. This will benefit both locals and visitors. One such program is At Your Service offered by University of Minnesota Extension. <http://www1.extension.umn.edu/community/customer-service-education/>
- Many ideas to develop the area for tourism will require new people and more people. This is likely the biggest challenge to make projects go. Community engagement and perseverance will be key to building and maintaining support and involvement. For example, both a senior group and a 4-H club were engaged in the inventory process for the Tourism Assessment Program. Keep finding ways to get those not currently engaged involved, if only in a small way.
- Consider the plans of neighboring communities, counties and region beyond the communities involved in this project. For example, meet in-person with Hutterite Colony, City of Barry, Ortonville Chamber of Commerce, Wheaton, Browns Valley, and the Sisseton-Wahpeton tribe to explore relationship building and ways to collaborate in attracting regional visitors.
- Create regular communications about tourism and local success. How do residents get information about every day events and other one time or annual events?



- Consider publishing a daily ‘newsflash’ one page flyer with good news about local folks. The goal would be to make readers smile. This promotes communities as happy, friendly, restful, welcoming places to participate in whatever is current: Hunting, fishing, kite flying, bird watching, star gazing
- The news flash could be delivered, emailed, or printed off for local hang outs and work places. A news flash could highlight a youth, a church event, a 4-H group, a rural person, town person.

Developing Leadership and Organization

- Generally, community collaboration and planning will be necessary to sustain any efforts and make them successful. Further, it is important to pay attention to economic, social, and environmental sustainability. For instance, consider technical and financial feasibility, including funding as well as benefit-cost ratios and cash flow potential before going ahead with any project. While local business and economic activities are best left to the private operators and their local associations or communities, Big Stone Area Growth (BSAG), can and should play a critical role by facilitating and leading a coalition of stakeholders including businesses, citizens, and various levels of government to develop sustainable tourism in the Clinton-Graceville-Beardsley area.



Photo by David Fluegel

- Involve community members as much as possible in BSAG’s vision and action plan. Local buy-in will generate positive local contributions rather than nonchalant or even negative local response to tourism development. Towards that end, BSAG should continue to recruit, involve and work with individuals and organizations in developing and implementing strategies that will create and support tourism and recreation business in the area. Explore partnering with selected organizations to educate both locals and tourists about sustainable use of the natural, cultural, and social resources in the area. Hold public meetings to discuss and plan for current and future tourism activities, including opportunities for people to come together and celebrate the unique natural resources, history and cultural background of the area.
- Identify a formal organization or group to take the lead in implementing ideas and projects. Initially the communities should consider relationships with regional organizations already in place to help. Both Western Minnesota Prairie Waters and Big Stone Area Chamber of Commerce are involved in tourism development and marketing. Their experience, connections and resources can be of great assistance.
- Work with Community Development Services, Inc. to develop a plan for moving tourism development opportunities forward in an organized manner that is realistic and can be measured. Communicate with residents and stakeholders to build support.

Marketing Tourism

- Utilize free promotional opportunities available on www.exploreminnesota.com Better images on the web site could feature the area's unique beauty, and add a descriptive sentence or paragraph. Take advantage of editorial opportunities in the Explorer newspaper insert, educational opportunities, and other opportunities that are found on the industry web site, www.industry.exploreminnesota.com
- Develop print or online maps geared towards
 - (1) hunters, displaying public hunting grounds and associated fall festivals/attractions corresponding to the season, and
 - (2) ag/food tourists with farms and food-related attractions. Use the regional Buy Fresh Buy Local design materials to tie the map or publication to an already-identified campaign. The Buy Fresh Buy Local logo is part of a national campaign and network of bio-regions chapters across the U.S. that identifies with sustainable principles and production methods. See <http://localfoods.umn.edu/bfblpotp>
- Create a marketing plan that incorporates multiple communication strategies to reach identified target markets.
- Partner with community and area businesses and organizations like Big Stone Lake Area Chamber of Commerce and Western Minnesota Prairie Waters to grow the available funds to market the area to potential visitors from the Twin Cities, Sioux Falls, Fargo/Moorhead, Willmar, and St. Cloud metropolitan areas.
- Take advantage of resources available through Explore Minnesota Tourism's regional office for help in planning, facilitation, and ideas that can help the efforts to promote tourism.
- Get on the web with the area's great assets by developing listings of things to do by city. Consider a Youtube video showing off the area and each community.
- Create a photo or video contest for residents and post winning entries on the website. As an example, the contest could be framed as five favorite things about my community, or five things to do in the C-G-B area.
- Explore the opportunity of becoming a Dark Sky destination. Local residents mentioned the beautiful skies at night and this is an attraction. Is there someone locally who can offer stargazing experiences? USA Today published a story about the 10 best places to stargaze ---- <http://www.usatoday.com/story/travel/destinations/10greatplaces/2012/10/11/international-dark-sky-association-stargazing/1627639/> These websites also describe Dark Sky destinations http://www.observingsites.com/ds_mn.htm or www.darksky.org

CONCLUSIONS

Thank you to the Clinton-Graceville-Beardsley leadership team, community residents, First Impression visitors, and expert team members. This project required the effort and resources of many people and organizations.

The communities of Clinton-Graceville-Beardsley have taken a positive first step in addressing their potential tourism opportunities. Many opportunities exist to make small changes so that visitors stop, stay longer and return to these communities. Matching the supply of tourism assets to the right tourism markets will help guide marketing and development decisions. As tourism becomes more a part of these communities' economies, measuring and communicating the value of tourism to residents will increase support for tourism initiatives.

Developing a tourism plan and involving residents and businesses will share the vision and build support. Set realistic goals, and recognize that expanding tourism takes time and consistent effort. There are many potential partners and resources ready and able to assist.

RESOURCES

The following are select regional or state resources that may be of assistance in moving forward with action steps.

- Big Stone Area Chamber of Commerce www.bigstonelake.org
- Explore Minnesota Tourism - Dave Vogel, Regional Manager dave.vogel@state.mn.us
- Explore Minnesota Tourism www.industry.exploreminnesota.com
- King of Trails Scenic Byway group
- Minnesota Green Step Cities <http://greenstep.pca.state.mn.us/>
- Minnesota Main Street <http://www.mnpreservation.org/programs/main-street/>
- Minnesota State Parks (DNR)
- Rural Tourism: It's Never Been A Better Time to Be A Small Town at <http://www.cfra.org/node/2504>
- Small Town Tourism: Building the Dreams http://www.iira.org/pubs/publications/IIRA_RRR_739.pdf
- Southwest Initiative Foundation
- Southwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership
- Western Minnesota Prairie Waters Convention & Visitors Bureau <http://www.prairiewaters.com/>
- University of Minnesota Tourism Center: www.tourism.umn.edu
- University of Minnesota Extension Community Economics Programs: <http://www.extension.umn.edu/community/about/community-economics/#central>



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APPENDICES

A: Sustainable Tourism

B: Explore Minnesota Tourism and Economy Fact Sheet, 2014

C: Project Application

D: Asset Inventories

E: SWOT Analysis



APPENDIX A: SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Destinations

The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Destinations (GSTC-D) and the related performance indicators have been created by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (www.gstccouncil.org). This is a worldwide effort led by a coalition of more than 30 diverse organizations, businesses and experts to come to a common understanding of sustainable tourism. Based on currently recognized criteria, certification standards, and best practices from around the world, the GSTC-D suggests minimum guidelines and a set of indicators to aid communities and businesses in establishing locally appropriate measures around four main themes:

- Effective sustainability planning
- Maximize social and economic benefits for the local community
- Enhance cultural heritage
- Reduce negative impacts to the environment.

The criteria are basic guidelines for communities seeking to be more sustainable in their tourism initiatives. In smaller communities, limited resources may prevent comprehensive application of all criteria. Smaller communities are encouraged to review the criteria and select those that are actionable locally. Using these criteria to monitor the effects of local actions will help the community identify improvement toward sustainability.

The GSTC-D is a tool gaining momentum globally, and the website mentioned above provides links to several community case studies demonstrating how communities of different sizes are applying sustainable practices. Reviewing these criteria and the community case examples may assist your community in applying sustainability in your own tourism development initiatives

APPENDIX B: EXPLORE MINNESOTA TOURISM AND ECONOMY FACT SHEET, 2014

EXPLORE Minnesota **Tourism and Minnesota's Economy**

Economic Impact: Sales and Jobs

Travel/tourism in Minnesota generates:

SALES

- \$12.5 billion in gross sales
- More than \$34 million a day

JOBS

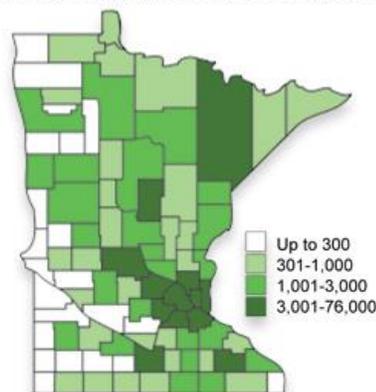
- More than 245,000 full- and part-time jobs
- 11% of total private sector employment
- \$4.3 billion in wages

REVENUE

- \$811 million in state sales tax
- 17% of state sales tax revenues

Note: Data for leisure & hospitality sector, 2012.

LEISURE & HOSPITALITY JOBS BY COUNTY, 2012



GROWTH IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

Sales at leisure and hospitality businesses grew 54% from 2000 to 2012, including 5% annual growth for 2012.



- Travel & tourism creates jobs and generates sales in virtually every county of Minnesota.
- Tourism jobs represent all levels of employment, from important entry level service jobs to high-paying executive positions.
- Traveler spending indirectly supports jobs in many other industries, as well, from financial services to printing.

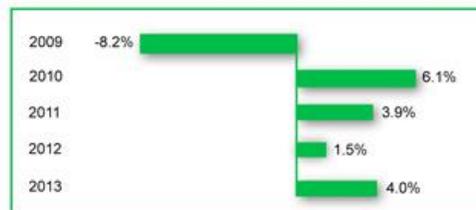
RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Every \$1 invested in state tourism marketing returns an estimated:

- \$8 in state and local taxes
- \$84 in spending by travelers

CHANGE IN MINNESOTA LODGING OCCUPANCY

Source: STR (Smith Travel Research, Inc.)



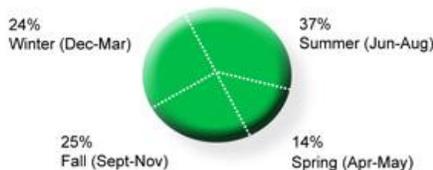
MINNESOTA RANKING AMONG STATES

The economic impact of travel & tourism in Minnesota ranks significantly higher compared to other states in:

Traveler Spending	22nd
Travel-Generated Employment	18th
Travel-Generated Payroll	14th
Travel-Generated Tax Receipts	9th

After a decline in occupancy in 2009 due to the recession, lodging properties have seen annual increases in occupancy.

TRAVELER EXPENDITURES BY SEASON



TRAVELER SPENDING BY SECTOR

Spending during Minnesota's 71 million annual person-trips (including overnight and day trips) is distributed throughout the economy:

- Food 25%
- Retail 18%
- Recreation 16%
- Transportation 16%
- Lodging 19%
- Second homes 6%

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2014

The FY2014 budget for Explore Minnesota Tourism is \$13.9 million, a significant, 66% increase in funding. With this additional investment, a new and expanded Explore Minnesota marketing campaign will debut in 2014.

Find more Information at: industry.exploreminnesota.com

Sources: Minnesota 2013 Tourism Advertising Evaluation and Image Study, Longwoods International; The Economic Impact of 2011 Travel in Minnesota, Tourism Economics; The Economic Impact of Expenditures by Travelers on Minnesota, June 2007-May 2008, Davidson-Peterson Associates; Minnesota Department of Revenue, 2012; Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, 2012; Bureau of Labor Statistics; U.S. Travel Association.

ECONOMIC IMPACT BY COUNTY

Minnesota's Leisure and Hospitality Industry, 2012

	Gross Sales	Sales Tax	Private Sector Employment		Gross Sales	Sales Tax	Private Sector Employment
Minneapolis - Saint Paul Area				Southern Minnesota			
Anoka	\$477,316,997	\$32,335,750	11,946	Big Stone	\$3,981,552	\$288,713	128
Carver	\$147,757,574	\$9,670,067	3,558	Blue Earth	\$163,413,193	\$10,761,636	3,812
Chisago	\$51,750,970	\$3,349,041	1,444	Brown	\$35,978,422	\$2,415,266	1,171
Dakota	\$756,875,628	\$50,422,799	16,657	Chippewa	\$16,097,127	\$1,116,951	382
Hennepin	\$4,240,067,280	\$280,741,109	75,525	Cottonwood	\$9,783,595	\$668,610	282
Isanti	\$32,486,466	\$2,263,043	871	Dodge	\$10,603,708	\$748,724	402
Ramsey	\$1,769,335,116	\$114,778,186	25,789	Faribault	\$11,001,957	\$720,257	305
Scott	\$309,920,392	\$17,654,986	6,168	Fillmore	\$20,503,063	\$1,444,022	578
Washington	\$437,255,748	\$29,667,435	10,378	Freeborn	\$42,175,002	\$2,830,232	1,092
Wright	\$181,130,118	\$10,836,093	4,406	Goodhue	\$69,132,826	\$4,750,638	1,733
Region Total	\$8,403,896,289	\$551,718,509	156,742	Houston	\$9,754,403	\$694,858	275
Central Minnesota				Jackson	\$10,890,094	\$671,491	313
Aitkin	\$20,692,436	\$1,425,354	497	Lac Qui Parle	\$4,071,170	\$291,795	88
Benton	\$54,858,985	\$3,625,581	1,286	Le Sueur	\$24,367,527	\$1,550,019	613
Crow Wing	\$201,073,526	\$12,686,611	3,892	Lincoln	\$3,565,954	\$263,732	103
Douglas	\$101,302,136	\$6,646,968	2,168	Lyon	\$66,993,915	\$3,048,196	1,381
Grant	\$3,031,590	\$193,803	47	Martin	\$31,101,613	\$2,085,872	840
Kandiyohi	\$77,016,965	\$4,829,598	1,582	Mower	\$56,191,224	\$3,363,419	1,306
McLeod	\$41,173,719	\$2,757,112	1,242	Murray	\$8,091,619	\$548,364	181
Meeker	\$16,657,239	\$1,122,629	431	Nicollet	\$34,746,412	\$2,416,047	923
Mille Lacs	\$50,259,624	\$2,704,777	905	Nobles	\$27,045,875	\$1,869,919	797
Morrison	\$37,953,902	\$2,650,027	1,069	Olmsted	\$396,425,482	\$26,354,806	7,982
Otter Tail	\$79,659,018	\$5,335,051	2,092	Pipestone	\$10,549,728	\$711,950	277
Pope	\$12,958,581	\$881,963	301	Redwood	\$27,583,097	\$1,953,300	399
Sherburne	\$78,969,255	\$4,882,658	1,990	Renville	\$9,121,424	\$647,690	274
Stearns	\$289,798,902	\$18,933,475	7,608	Rice	\$139,958,353	\$6,025,710	2,333
Stevens	\$16,022,664	\$944,069	463	Rock	\$9,424,079	\$651,954	215
Todd	\$20,289,225	\$1,411,145	406	Sibley	\$7,537,573	\$544,233	162
Wadena	\$14,577,092	\$983,273	371	Steele	\$61,538,609	\$4,121,598	1,401
Region Total	\$1,116,294,859	\$72,014,094	26,350	Swift	\$8,651,992	\$617,172	239
Northwest Minnesota				Traverse	\$2,187,294	\$164,983	NA
Becker	\$68,776,424	\$4,399,765	1,459	Wabasha	\$25,620,714	\$1,718,486	777
Beltrami	\$82,096,909	\$5,249,317	1,872	Waseca	\$14,349,281	\$907,047	388
Cass	\$102,411,781	\$6,196,420	1,736	Watonwan	\$7,821,691	\$535,815	213
Clay	\$73,111,131	\$4,653,784	1,872	Winona	\$93,844,551	\$6,407,935	2,448
Clearwater	\$4,562,173	\$328,117	138	Yellow Medicine	\$13,838,318	\$554,384	211
Hubbard	\$29,955,194	\$2,018,357	741	Region Total	\$1,487,942,437	\$94,465,824	34,024
Kittson	\$3,056,600	\$220,142	70	Northeast Minnesota			
Lake of the Woods	\$31,860,767	\$1,810,876	479	Carlton	\$59,989,204	\$3,928,136	1,018
Mahnomen	\$16,465,104	\$970,379	122	Cook	\$55,099,915	\$3,509,141	880
Marshall	\$4,864,753	\$375,197	144	Itasca	\$69,252,200	\$4,458,591	1,501
Norman	\$3,020,579	\$215,947	67	Kanabec	\$14,045,543	\$924,158	308
Pennington	\$24,035,703	\$1,637,725	536	Koochiching	\$28,709,105	\$1,898,868	519
Polk	\$43,504,674	\$2,711,711	1,099	Lake	\$29,804,253	\$2,053,201	881
Red Lake	\$1,927,256	\$137,787	66	Pine	\$63,658,221	\$3,423,625	1,022
Roseau	\$19,603,999	\$1,313,260	344	St Louis	\$473,912,454	\$32,100,727	10,354
Wilkin	\$4,021,685	\$299,055	159	Region Total	\$794,470,895	\$52,296,447	16,483
Region Total	\$513,274,732	\$32,537,839	10,904	Minnesota Total	\$12,467,603,066	\$810,615,926	245,411

Notes: State total does not equal the sum of counties or regions because some data is withheld to avoid disclosure of individual businesses; and some state level data is for businesses located outside of Minnesota. The Leisure and Hospitality industry consists of Accommodations; Food Services and Drinking Places; and Arts, Entertainment and Recreation.

Sources: Minnesota Department of Revenue; Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development

Produced by Explore Minnesota Tourism, an office of the State of Minnesota. 1/14

APPENDIX C: PROJECT APPLICATION

Community Application Form

Applications are due by noon on **May 15, 2013** and communities will be notified by **May 31, 2013**.
Please submit this application to your Regional Sustainable Development Partnership office listed on the last page.

Community Criteria:

Non-metro townships or communities in Minnesota with a population under 1500 or a group of 2-3 small communities (each under 1500) may apply. Groups of communities must be in geographic proximity and be willing to or have experience working together. Potential team members to consider:

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chamber/CVB Director | <input type="checkbox"/> Resort/Hotel/Motel/B&B, etc. | <input type="checkbox"/> Natural Resources Specialist |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parks & Recreation Director | <input type="checkbox"/> Attraction manager | <input type="checkbox"/> Museum staff |
| <input type="checkbox"/> City planning or economic development staff | <input type="checkbox"/> Retailer | <input type="checkbox"/> Historical Society staff / volunteers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Township supervisor or clerk | <input type="checkbox"/> Restaurateur | <input type="checkbox"/> Arts / theater Organization |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Youth representative | <input type="checkbox"/> Others as appropriate |

Contact Information:

Community:	County: Big Stone County
Partner Communities Names: (if applicable): Clinton, Graceville, and Beardsley	
Local Coordinator: Liz Larkin	Email: liz@dsi-services.com
Street Address: 402 N. Harold St.	
City: Ivanhoe, MN	Zip Code: 56142
Telephone: 507-694-1552	Community website: www.bigstonelake.com
Additional Team members & emails (minimum of two people in addition to Local Coordinator required and multi-community applications must include team members from each community) Donnette Herberg; chamber@bigstonelake.com Mike Folk, Beardsley, MN; Audrey Rahlien, Graceville, MN Brent Olson, Clinton, MN	

Continued on next page



Please answer in one short paragraph: How ready do you feel your community is to engage in this project? How will you use the findings from this program to benefit your community?

Our communities are extremely excited for the opportunity to engage in this project. Our communities continue to work together in a cohesive manner to further development and tourism opportunities in our area. The findings of the project will be used to remind people of the lost treasures in the area. This information will be used to further the shared vision of the communities' growth plan. The action items in the growth plan will assist in publishing new marketing materials and to increase public relations. Big Stone Area Growth will view the information for the advancement of the entrepreneurial spirit in the area. New and existing businesses will have the opportunity to enhance their business needs by combining them with tourism aspects and the knowledge gained from the program.

Applicant Terms of Agreement:

- Our community already has at least 3 people who have agreed to serve on the Community Leadership Team. This team will be responsible during the next 1-2 years for facilitating program logistics in the community and helping guide implementation of the program locally. One person will chair the Leadership Team and be the primary contact person.
- Our community realizes that implementing this tourism assessment program takes a commitment of time and requires financial resources to support meetings, the community visit and implementation of recommendations.
- Our community will host the visiting tourism experts for a 1-2 day visit by providing complimentary commercial lodging and meals, and arrange for interviews and meetings with community stakeholders. These may be in-kind contributions.
- Our community will send representatives to the statewide celebration of communities in this project.
- Our community is prepared to create action steps to develop tourism assets.

Sign & Date: Elizabeth Larkin 5-15-2013

Partner community signatures as applicable:

Questions, please contact:

Cynthia Messer, Extension Professor
University of Minnesota Tourism Center
cmesser@umn.edu or call 612.624.6236



The University of Minnesota Tourism Center is a collaboration of the College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences and University of Minnesota Extension.

APPENDIX D: ASSET INVENTORIES

Evaluation of Existing Attractions																						
ATTRACTION	Tourism Development Assessment Criteria (Rate 1-4)						Market				Months of Use											
	Quality	Authenticity	Uniqueness	Drawing Power	Activities	Average Rating	Local	Regional	US	Int'l	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Beardsley Park	3	3	2	2	2	2.4																
Big Stone Co. Fair	3	2	1	3	3	2.4																
Big Stone Lake	3	4	1	3		3																
Bird Watching	4	4	4	4	4	4																
Brewers & Winemaking	3	3	3	3	1	2.6																
CC Skiing & Snowmobile Trails	3	3	3	2	2	2.6																
Churches	3	3	3	3	2	2.8																
Corn Fest	3	4	1	1	2	2.2																
Depot Park (Clinton)	3	4	4	2	2	2.8																
Don's Alley	3	1	1	2	3	2																
Farmers Market	3	3	3	2	2	2.6																
Fischer's Outback	3	3	2	2	3	2.6																
Garden Tours	3	3	3	3	1	2.6																
Graceville Craft Show	3	3	1	2	2	2.2																
Graceville Golf Club	3	1	2	2	2	2																
Graceville Gun Club	4	4	3	2	2	3																
Hunting	4	4	3	3	4	3.6																
Ice Fishing	4	4	4	3	2	3.4																
Lake Side Park	3	3	2	2	1	2.2																
Library	3	3	2	2	2	2.4																
Rolling Acres Boutique	3	4	4	3	4	3.6																
RV & Tent Camping	4	4	3	3	1	3																
Shabulous	3	4	4	3	1	3																
Softball Tournaments	3	4	1	1	1	2																
St. Patrick's Day Parade	4	3	3	3	4	3.4																
Toqua Days	3	4	1	1	2	2.2																
Toqua Park	3	2	2	3	3	2.6																
Wadsworth Trail	4	4	3	3	1	3																
Wildlife	4	3	3	3	1	2.8																

APPENDIX E: SWOT ANALYSIS

INTERNAL		EXTERNAL	
INTERNAL		EXTERNAL	
STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<p>Community: CGB</p> <p>These are elements within the community that may affect your ability to reach your goals — leadership, lack of vision, funding, communication, physical resources, human resources etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ag heritage/ Local foods • Natural resources • Landscape • Community enthusiasm • New talent emerging • New sense of energy • Natural environment • Local school • High # of artists • Youthful city council • Low population • Bonanza ctr • Big Stone Lake • Hospital lake view • Glacial history • Closest county to original biome – prairie pothole • Customer service at local businesses • Unused buildings • A top birder area • Big sky – star gazing • Hunting • Fishing • Town team baseball • Wind elect generation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Kites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult for visitors to find information about local resources • Lack of accommodation options • Not recognizing available potential (people, places, organizations) • Lack of accommodations • Lodging • Marketing – awareness promotion • Low population – volunteerism limits • Lodging options • Aging population • Understanding of tourism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Attitude → resource • What are the messages to the kids? • Knowledge of resources • Marketing of resources • Engagement of youth • Business support/organization • Population ↓ • Don't always feel welcome as an outsider/visitor • Lack of restaurant variety 	<p>External forces can impact your ability to achieve your goals but you may not be able to control them – technology, political, economy, social, government regulation, suppliers etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of life • Partnering with neighboring towns/orgs. • TRAVEL TRENDS – destination vacations, green, authentic • Bundle 3 communities • Make the area a destination (natural resources) • Meander – arts in the area • Promise of gov. support for internet • Hunting/fishing/outdoor • Slogans: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ "Give me a break" ◦ "Recharge the battery" ◦ "La prairie" ◦ "Go away from tech" ◦ "Go where the weather report doesn't" • Local artists – meander= eye opener • Renewed interest in preserving prairie pot hole biome • Visitor Kiosk • Non-profits etc interest in rural • Making it a destination...orchards, vineyards • Tougher economy = more staycations • More RV-ers nationally • Positive people to support new ideas (eg. Restaurant) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farm Bill • Leakage of local \$, ie to Big Box • Travel time constraints • LOWER EXPECTATIONS • \$ • Lack of community support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Don't want change • Low expectations – Don't value what they have • \$ funding/ROI • ECONOMY • Distance to population centers • Industry agriculture • Water quality • Weather extremes • Smaller population to accommodate visitors • Losing businesses • Climate change • Farm Bill undermining consent • Threats to LGA • Cost to market – Gas

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<p>Community: CGB</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local foods – farmers’ market • Farm tours – coop in Ortonville • City service club • Hospital foundation • Natural resource • Sunsets • Existing physical assets <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Lake ◦ Prairie • Gun Club • Golf Course • Campground • Fair grounds • Strong families • Migrating birds/butterflies • How communities work together – synergy • Nature • Fun historical stuff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Wadsworth trail • Beautiful buildings • Natural environment • New, emerging, talent • School systems • Fishing and hunting • Recent websites • Community will help in crisis • Community enthusiasm/ Artist → people • State of mind of people • Healthy natural environment • Bonding between the 3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business hours • Difficult for visitors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Welcoming with all amenities and accommodations that visitors need • State of mind (your own) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ “Who would want to come here?” • Lack of information available – documentation • Lack of rental equipment • Short on accommodation options • Marketing • Tight knit community – hard to look out- hard to look in • Lack of place to stay • Lack of internet • Letting people know what’s out here • People not thinking from outside orientation • Not recognizing own potential • Consolidation of farms removal of land from CRP • Lack of volunteerism – ‘age group’ – same 5 people doing all the work • Weak economy – not \$10 com vs strong economy in other • Aging pop. – difficulty replacing • Knowledge of available programs → lots of free/useful thing available • Old buildings/ houses deteriorating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TRAVEL TRENDS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Destination vacations (for 1 wk) ◦ Green travel ◦ Authentic travel <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Local foods • Bundle with 3 communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Big Stone Lake region and beyond
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<p>Community: CGB</p> <p>communities (separate but working together)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lots of protected landscape • Lots of nature know how's • Good road – accessible • Bed & breakfast • Fantastic local newspaper • Open space • No congestion – commute time low/predictable • Family farms • Technology – sorta/almost • Healthcare – hospitals • Good schools • Unique festivals • Orchards • More building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordable/available energy 	
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Community: CGB			
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Community:		STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
OPPORTUNITIES	1. 2.	Opportunity-Strength (OS) Strategies Use strengths to take advantage of opportunities	Opportunity-Weakness (OW) Strategies Overcome weaknesses by taking advantage of opportunities
1. 2.	1. 2.		1. 2.
THREATS	1. 2.	Threat-Strength (TS) Strategies Use strengths to avoid threats	Threat-Weakness (TW) Strategies Minimize weaknesses and avoid threats
1. 2.	1. 2.		1. 2.

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Community: CGB

ACTION IDEAS:

SO:

New talent + Destination = use these to new ideas/ businesses
- Find a way to tap them

Natural Env + Travel Trend = Cross water/ Farming/ with travel trends

- More green
- Family
- Segment market

Natural environment + community potential = each community list potential Asset list
→ Make a list

Friendliness + Hunting + fishing opportunities = Nice accommodation – guides

Natural resources - _____ = promote

IS:

Farm Bill / threaten conservation + landscape/Natural environment = People have strong stewardship values

Distance from pop centers + Meander = Market meander to new places

- Leave brochures

_____ + Large lakes = Kite flying festivals? Kite markers?

Breezes for kites

Open land

- Get local people to know what's here
- Sponsor skills in area

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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA | EXTENSION

Community: CGB

OW:

Lack of accommodation + Travel trend = 1. Ideal lodging per travel trend

2. What's available here

Cider interest = lodge at Farm

Information Kiosk

Day Trips

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